

Message Text

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

PAGE 01 COLOMB 00071 01 OF 02 071228Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 DOTE-00 MCT-01 USPS-01
/070 W

-----071236Z 102768 /10

R 071125Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6483
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
RUSBAY 647
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 COLOMBO 0071

E.O. 11652:N/A
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, CE
SUBJECT: STRIKE CONTINUES TO SPREAD

REF: AKA) 76 COLOMBO 4725, (B) 76 COLOMBO 4756, (C) COLOMBO 0013
(D) COLOMBO 0054

1. SUMMARY: MOST STRIKING RAILWAY WORKERS CONTINUE TO DEFY THE GOVERNMENT'S IMPOSITION OF THE ESSENTIAL SERVICES ORDER, UNDER WHICH THEY WERE TO RETURN TO WORK JANUARY 6. STRIKES ARE SPREADING WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT SERVICE IN SUPPORT OF THE RAIL WORKERS. THE NATIONALIZED BUS SERVICE MAY BE STRUCK JANUARY 9. THE GOVERNMENT HAS AS YET MADE NO MOVES TOWARD ENFORCING THE RATHER DRASTIC PENALTIES UNDER THE ESSENTIAL SERVICES ORDER, WHICH HAS NOW BEEN EXTENDED TO COVER THE ENTIRE GOVERNMENT SECTOR. SOME OPPOSITION UNIONS HESITATE TO JOIN THE STRIKE FOR FEAR THAT THE RESULTING DISORDER MAY GIVE PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE AN EXCUSE TO POSTPONE GENERAL ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR THIS YEAR.

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

PAGE 02 COLOMB 00071 01 OF 02 071228Z

DESPITE THE STRIKES, THE ATMOSPHERE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY IS RELATIVELY CALM; THIS COULD CHANGE RAPIDLY HOWEVER. END SUMMARY.

2. DESPITE THE GOVERNMENT'S ATTEMPTS TO ORDER STRIKERS BACK TO WORK, THE WORK STOPPAGES CONTINUE TO SPREAD TO OTHER SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY. THE ESSENTIAL SERVICES

ORDER, UNDER THE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS, HAS BEEN EXTENDED TO COVER THE ENTIRE GOVERNMENT SECTOR, THUS MAKING ABSENTEES FROM CENTRAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES LIABLE TO THE SAME DRACONIAN PENALTIES (UP TO FIVE YEARS IMPRISONMENT AND CONFISCATION OF PROPERTY) AS STRIKING RAILWAY WORKERS AND DOCTORS.

3. MOST OF THE RAILWAY WORKERS, WHO BEGAN THE CURRENT WALKOUT DECEMBER 21, WITH A DEMAND FOR AN END-OF-THE - YEAR SALARY ADVANCE OF 500 RUPEES, HAVE STILL NOT RETURNED TO WORK; MANY OF THOSE WHO HAVE HEEDED THE GOVERNMENT'S ORDER TO RETURN ARE WHITE COLLAR WORKERS OF THE RAILWAYS DEPARTMENT, WHO ARE NO HELP IN RESTORING TRAIN SERVICE. EVEN IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT OF ALL THE RAILWORKERS RETURNING IMMEDIATELY, WE UNDERSTAND IT WOULD TAKE AT LEAST ONE WEEK TO RETURN THE TRAIN SYSTEM TO NORMAL BECAUSE OF REQUIRED MAINTENANCE WORK AND REPAIRS ON THE TRACK AND SIGNAL SYSTEM, WHICH HAVE BEEN DAMAGED BY STRIKERS. IN ANY EVENT, NO TRAINS HAVE RUN SINCE BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

4. THE REACTION OF MUCH OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT TO THE IMPOSITION OF THE ESSENTIAL SERVICES ORDER HAS BEEN AN ANGRY DENUNCIATION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S INTRUSION ON TRADE UNION PREROGATIVES. THE TROTSKYITE LANKA SAMAJA PARTY (LSSP)- AFFILIATED UNIONS, WHICH HAVE PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE RAILWAY STRIKE, HAVE NOW ANNOUNCED THEIR INTENTION OF BRINGING OUT THEIR MEMBERS IN THE PRIVATE AND GOVERNMENT CORPORATION SECTORS EFFECTIVE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

PAGE 03 COLOMB 00071 01 OF 02 071228Z

JANUARY 12. THE NATION-WIDE BUS SYSTEM MAY COME TO A STANDSTILL FROM A THREATENED STRIKE BEGINNING JANUARY 9 BY WORKERS FROM LSSP UNIONS AS WELL AS COMMUNIST PARTY AND OPPOSITION UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP)- AFFILIATED UNIONS. THEY ARE REPORTED TO BE JOINED IN THEIR STRIKE PLANS BY ONE WING OF PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE'S SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP), THE SO-CALLED PRO-MAOIST OR JANAVEGAYA BRANCH (THIS WAS ANNOUNCED BY SLFP M.P. NANDA ELLAWALA; HIS OCCASIONAL SIDEKICK, KUMAR RUPASINGHE, THE PRIME MINISTER'S SON-IN-LAW, HAS BEEN NOTABLE FOR HIS SILENCE ON THE SUBJECT.) IT IS RUMORED THAT ARMED FORCES RESERVES ARE LIKELY TO BE CALLED UP SOON, POSSIBLY TO HELP RUN BUS SERVICES, IF NECESSARY.

5. A VARIETY OF OTHER UNIONS HAVE GONE OUT ON STRIKE, PARTIALLY IN SUPPORT OF THE RAILWAY WORKERS AND PARTIALLY FOR THEIR OWN DEMANDS. SOME GOVERNMENT CLERKS ARE OUT AS WELL AS WORKERS AT SUCH GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

AS THE FOOD COMMISSIONER'S DEPARTMENT, THE CIVIL
MEDICAL STORES, AND THE GOVERNMENT HANDICRAFT
EMPORIUM, LAKSALA. THE COLOMBO PORT COMMISSION HAS BEEN
COMPLETELY STRUCK ALTHOUGH THE NAVY APPEARS TO BE COPING
WITH MOST OF THE COMMISSION'S NORMAL WORK
(PILOTING AND MAINTENANCE TALKS). THE ALL-IMPORTANT
DOCK WORKERS, WHO FALL INTO A SEPARATE OCCUPATIONAL
CATEGORY, HAVE DECIDED NOT TO STRIKE DESPITE URGINGS
FROM THE LSSP UNIONS.
REED

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

NNN

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

PAGE 01 COLOMB 00071 02 OF 02 071223Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 DOTE-00 MCT-01 USPS-01
/070 W

-----071239Z 102743 /10

R 071125Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6484
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 COLOMBO 0071

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, CE
SUBJECT: STRIKE CONTINUTES TO SPREAD

REF (A) 76 COLOMBO 4725, (B) 76 COLOMBO 4756, (C) COLOMBO 0013
(D) COLOMBO 0054

6. GOVERNMENT DOCTORS, WHOSE SEPARATE "WORK-TO-RULE"
CAMPAIGN PREDATES THE RAILWAY STRIKE, MEET JANUARY 9
TO DECIDE WHETHER TO GO BACK TO WORKING NORMALLY. OTHER
UNIONS NOT REPEAT NOT ON STRIKE INCLUDE THE POSTAL
WORKERS, WHO HAD TRHREATNED TO GO OUT EARLIER THIS WEEK,
AND THE MEMBER UNIONS OF THE INDEPENDENT TRADE
UNION COORDINATING COMMITTEE (TUCC-SEE 76 COLOMBO

A 101). THIS BODY, WHICH INCLUDES IMPORTANT UNIONS IN THE PLANTATIONS AND IN THE COLOMBO COMMERCIAL AND MERCANTILE SECTOR, HAS SENT A LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER URGING NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE RAIL WORKERS AND CALLING FOR A LIFTING OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY (IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

PAGE 02 COLOMB 00071 02 OF 02 071223Z

EFFECT SINCE MARCH 1971 WHEN THE RADICAL YOUTH INSURGENCY OCCURRED). LIKE THE OPPOSITION UNITED NATIONAL PARTY UNIONS, WHICH HAVE BEEN EQUIVOCAL ABOUT SUPPORTING THE STRIKE(EACH UNP UNION HAS BEEN LEFT TO MAKE ITS OWN DECISION), THE TUCC UNIONS DO NOT WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO CREATING THE SORT OF CHAOTIC SITUATION THAT MIGHT ENCOURAGE THE PRIME MINISTER TO POSTPONE GENERAL ELECTIONS, NOW DUE SOMETIME BEFORE SEPTEMBER.

7. DESPITE THE GOVERNMENT'S IMPOSITION OF THE ESSENTIAL SERVICES ORDER, THERE HAS BEEN AS YET NO MOVE TO IMPLEMENT IT BY JAILING ANY UNION LEADERS. ALTHOUGH POLICE DO HAVE ORDERS TO ARREST ANYONE INTERFERING WITH WORKERS RETURNING TO THE JOB, THE CURRENT ATTITUDE OF THE GOVERNMENT AND POLICE IS ILLUSTRATED BY AN INCIDENT JANUARY 6 AT AN LSSP-ORGANIZED LABOR RALLY. UNION LEADER BATTY WEERAKOON DEFIED A BAN ON THE USE OF AMPLIFIERS AT PUBLIC MEETINGS WHILE HARANGUING THE AUDIENCE TO COME OUT ON STRIKE. ALTHOUGH THE RALLY WAS SURROUNDED BY POLICE, NO ACTION WAS TAKEN AT THE TIME; THE POLICE LATER CALLED AT WEERAKOON'SHOUSE, CAUTIONED HIM, AND TOOK A STATEMENT FROM HIM.

8. COMMENT: DESPITE THIS LITANY OF STRIKES AND OTHER AGITATIONS, IT SHOULD BE STRESSED THAT COLOMBO IS NOT IN A STATE OF INORDINATE TENSION. WHILE THE SITUATION CONTINUEUS TO DETERIORATE DAILY, AT THE PRESENT TIME, THERE IS NO GREAT UPROAR. A SUCCESSFUL BUS STRIKE, AS THREATENED FOR NEXT WEEK, COMBINED WITH THE RAILWAY WORKERS REMAINING OUT,COULD GO A LONG WAY TOWARD SHUTTING DOWN COLOMBO. SUCH AN EVENTUALITY COULD FORCE THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE SOME UNPREDICTABLE FURTHER ACTION, INCLUDING CONCEIVABLY THE POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS, ALTHOUGH THAT WOULD ONLY INFLAME THE OPPOSITION.

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

PAGE 03 COLOMB 00071 02 OF 02 071223Z

9. IT IS ALSO WORTH NOTING THAT THE BASICALLY GRASS

ROOTS ORGIN OF THE STRIKE, THE ADAMANCY OF THE RAIL
WORKERS, AND THE RESPONSIVE CHORD THEY HAVE STRUCK WITH
OTHER WORKERS GIVES US THE STRONG IMPRESSION THAT
MUCH OF THE FORCE BEHIND THIS UNREST COMES FROM
A STRONG, UNFOCUSED SENSE 9* *47 54-589, 9, 5#3 PART
OF THE WORKERS AT THE RISING COST OF LIVING AND THEIR
CURRENT PLIGHT IN THIS COUNTRY. SUCH A FEELING OF
FRUSTRATION IS NOT EASILY ASSURAGED.
REED

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: UNION GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, RAILROADS, LABOR STRIKES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 07-Jan-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977COLOMB00071
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770006-1328
Format: TEL
From: COLOMBO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770173/aaaacjlc.tel
Line Count: 233
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 669c30dc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 COLOMBO 4725, 76 COLOMBO 4756, 77 COLOMBO 13, 77 COLOMBO 54
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3647241
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: STRIKE CONTINUES TO SPREAD
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, CE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/669c30dc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009